



CONGRESSIONAL HEARING RESUME

106TH Congress

Date: 29 Sep 99

SUBJECT: Hearing on Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP), Impacts Reserve and Guard

COMMITTEE: Subcommittee on National Security, Veteran's Affairs, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform

CHAIRMAN: The Honorable Christopher Shays (R-CT)

MEMBERS PRESENT (bold face):

REPUBLICANS

Chris Shays (CT)
Mark Souder (R-IN)
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL)
John McHugh (NY)
John Mica (FL)
Dave McIntosh (IN)
Mark Sanford (SC)
Lee Terry (NE)
Judy Biggert (IL)
Helen Chenoweth (ID)

DEMOCRATS

Rod Blagojevich (IL)
Tom Lantos (CA)
Bob Wise (WV)
John Tiernay (MA)
Thomas Allen (ME)
Edolphus Towns (NY)
Bernard Sanders-I-At Large (VT)
Janice Schakowsky (IL)

Non Committee Members attending included **Rep Burton, R-IN, Rep Jones, R-NC, Rep Metcalf, R-WA, Rep Thompson, D-CA**

WITNESSES: See next page

Information contained in this resume was obtained during an open hearing. It will not be released outside of the Department of Defense (DOD) agencies until published hearing transcripts have been released by the Committee, and only to the extent it is in accord with published hearing procedures.

Prepared by: Maj Brad Oswalt

Date: 29 Sep 1999

Ext: 697-9110

WITNESSES

Panel One

Lt Col Tom Heemstra
Pilot, Indiana Air National Guard

Maj Cheryl Hansen
Nurse, Air Force Reserve, Andrews AFB

Capt Dave Panzera
Pilot, New York Air National Guard

TSgt Bill Mangieri
New York Air National Guard

Panel Two

Dr Charles Cragin
Acting Assistant Secretary for Reserves Affairs

Maj Gen Paul Weaver
Director, Air National Guard

Col Fred Gerber
Director, Health Care Operations
Office of the Army Surgeon General

Col James Dougherty
Air Surgeon, National Guard Bureau

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The hearing focused on the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program's (AVIP) impact on Guard and Reserve and the accuracy of tracking data for the program. Committee members were sympathetic to the plight of service personnel who want to decline the vaccination. Anti-AVIP witnesses told anecdotal stories of potential mass resignations and plummeting morale at Guard and Reserve installations across the country. Members appeared genuinely concerned that the AVIP is hurting readiness, especially in pilot retention in the Guard and Reserve. Several Members quoted statistics that large numbers of pilots at various Reserve and Guard bases will resign if the AVIP continues. Dr Cragin and other OSD witnesses disputed those statistics and stated that recruiting and retention numbers have not been impacted to date. Dr Cragin indicated that he visits bases all around the world and morale is high. Gen Weaver stated that retention rates for the Air National Guard are at a five year high. Chairman Shays stated the Committee is close to writing its final report on AVIP, but did not indicate how they would characterize the program. Based upon previous comments it will likely be negative and highly critical of the AVIP.

The hearing opened at 1005.

Chairman Shay's Opening Remarks

- Questioned whether DoD had an adequate tracking system for the AVIP
- Stated that attrition rates in the Guard and Reserve were exceeding 30% in some units

Other Opening comments:

Rep Burton: We're facing a mass exodus of pilots from our Reserve component

Rep Blagojevich: Believes using DEERS to track vaccines is a huge improvement for DoD from where we were before

Rep Souder: Doesn't believe the "enforced" vaccination program will work and questions whether it is effective

Rep Metcalf: Morale is being hurt by DoD's "stubborn unwillingness" to address the AVIP adequately

PANEL ONE

- All witnesses stated negative views regarding the AVIP

Lt Col Heemstra, F-16 Pilot

- Military personnel are simply guinea pigs under the AVIP and 83% of Americans believe that military personnel should have the right to refuse the vaccine
- Thousands of man-years of experience are leaving the Reserve and Guard

Maj Hansen: Did not believe that potential adverse side-effects are being adequately explained to personnel

Capt Panzera: Emphasized that massive losses of experienced personnel will cripple the Guard

TSgt Mangieri: Biological warfare/force protection expert. Stated the AVIP is flawed and believes his outspoken position led to denial of his reenlistment this past summer in NY Air National Guard

PANEL TWO:

Charles Cragin

- Addressed threat and need to protect our Total Force
- Stated that readiness has *not* been impaired due to AVIP
- Every year we have 18-20% turnover in the Reserves and personnel leave for a variety of reasons--believes few would cite AVIP as prime reason
- Discussed the tracking process--“triple redundancy” of personal shot records, medical records at medical facilities, and automated data systems for commanders
- All Service tracking systems feed DEERS, although there is a time lag
- Confident that individual Service tracking systems are more accurate than DEERS and vaccinations are accurately tracked and administered

Rep Burton:

- Outlined potential losses of 32 pilots at Travis, 25 at Ft Wayne Indiana, and 21 pilots at Dover
- Emotionally highlighted his grandchildren's bad experiences with vaccinations
- Gen Weaver responded to Rep Burton's numbers by stating that we can't track people's intentions--only when they formally resign
- Asked whether vaccine protects against all anthrax strains--Col Dougherty stated it does

Rep Souder: Appeared more sympathetic to the AVIP, but is concerned that FDA would not approve the current vaccine if it had to go through today's more advanced FDA testing procedures

Rep Shays:

- Compared the program to the “Maginot Line” since AVIP addresses one possible threat, but misses other possible biological threats
- Challenged DoD's compliance with FDA's protocol for the six shot series
 - “DoD allows lag-times on the vaccinations and therefore does *NOT* comply with FDA requirements”
- Requested DoD track whether AVIP is primary reason why personnel leave the Reserve and Guard. Gen Weaver stated he would comply with that request

The hearing was adjourned at 1445